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APPLICATION FOR LETTERS PATENT

TITLE: METHOD FOR RECOGNIZING SPEECH WITH
NOISE-DEPENDENT VARIANCE NORMALIZATION

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Description

1 The present invention relates to a method for recognizing speech and more particularly to a method for recognizing speech which uses noise-dependent variance normalization.

5 Methods for recognizing speech can generally be subdivided into the sections of inputting or receiving a speech signal, preprocessing said speech signal, a process of recognition and a section of outputting a recognized result.

10 Before the step of recognizing a speech signal said speech signal is generally preprocessed. Said preprocessing section comprises for instance a step of digitizing an incoming analogue speech signal, a step of filtering and/or the like.

15 Additionally, it has been found that including a step of variance normalization of the received speech signal, a derivative and/or a component thereof can in some cases increase the recognition rate in the following recognition section, but not in all cases.

20 It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide a method for recognizing speech in which a variance normalization step is applicable in a particular simple and robust way.

25 The object is achieved by a method for recognizing speech with the features as set forth in claim 1. Preferred embodiments of the inventive method for recognizing speech are within the scope of the dependent subclaims.

30 The proposed method for recognizing speech comprises a preprocessing section in which a step of performing variance normalization is applicable to a given or received speech signal, derivative and/or to a component thereof. According to the invention the preprocessing section of the proposed method for recognizing speech comprises a step of performing a statistical analysis of said speech signal, a derivative and/or of a component thereof, thereby generating and/or providing statistical evaluation data. From the so derived statistical evaluation data the inventive method generates and/or provides normalization degree data. Additionally, the inventive method for recognizing speech comprises in

1 its preprocessing section a step of performing a variance normalization on said
speech signal, a derivative and/or on a component thereof in accordance with
said normalization degree data - in particular with a normalization strength
corresponding to said normalization degree data - with normalization degree
5 data having a value or values in the neighbourhood of 0 indicating that no
variance normalization has to be performed.

10 It is therefore an essential idea of the present invention not to perform a
variance normalization in all cases of received or input speech signals but to
decide to what degree a variance normalization has to be carried out on the
speech signal, a derivative and/or on a component thereof in dependence on a
statistical analysis of said speech signal and/or of said derivative or compo-
nent thereof. To control the extent of the variance normalization, normalization
degree data are derived from said statistical evaluation data coming out from
5 the statistical analysis, wherein normalization degree data being zero or lying
in the vicinity of zero implying that no variance normalization has to be per-
formed.

20 In contrast to prior art methods for recognizing speech employing variance
normalization the inventive method for recognizing speech uses a variance nor-
malization, the extent of which is dependent on the quality of the received or
input speech signal or the like. By this measure disadvantages of prior art
methods can be avoided. Variance normalization is applied to an extent which
is advantageous for the recognition rate. Therefore, variance normalization is
25 adapted with respect to the noise level being represented by the statistical
evaluation data and being converted into the variance normalization degree
data.

30 Of course, said statistical analysis can be carried out on the speech signal
and/or on the derivative or component thereof in its entirety. In some cases it
is of particular advantage to perform said statistical analysis in an at least
piecewise or partially frequency-dependent manner. For instance the received
and/or input speech signal and/or the derivative or component thereof may be
subdivided in frequency space in certain frequency intervals. Each frequency
35 component or frequency interval of the speech signal and/or of its derivative or
component may independently be subjected to the process of statistical
analysis yielding different statistical evaluation data for the different and

- 1 distinct frequency components or intervals.

The same holds for the generation and provision of statistical evaluation data and/or for the generation and provision of said normalization degree data.

- 5 They may also be generated and provided for the received and input speech signal and/or for the derivative or component thereof in its entirety. But it may be again of particular advantage to use said frequency decomposition or its decomposition into frequency intervals.

- 10 The particular advantage of the above discussed measures lies in the fact that different frequency ranges of the speech signal may be subjected to different noise sources. Therefore, in particular in the case of a non-uniform noise source, different frequency components of the input or received speech signal may have different noise levels and they may therefore be subjected to
5 different degrees to the process of variance normalization.

Said statistical analysis may preferably include a step of determining signal-to-noise ratio data or the like. This may be done again in particular in a frequency-dependent manner.

- 20 According to a further preferred embodiment of the inventive method for recognizing speech a set of discrete normalization degree values is used as said normalization degree data. In particular, each of said discrete normalization degree values is assigned to a certain frequency interval, and said
25 frequency intervals may preferably have no overlap.

- It is of particular advantage to use discrete normalization degree values which are situated in the interval of 1 and 0. According to another preferred embodiment of the inventive method for recognizing speech a normalization degree
30 value in the neighbourhood of 0 and/or being identical to 0 indicates that the process of variance normalization has to be skipped for the respective assigned frequency interval. That means, that the respective speech signal and/or the derivative or component thereof is an almost undisturbed signal for which a variance normalization would be disadvantageous with respect to the following
35 recognition process.

In a similar way it is of particular advantage to assign in each case to a

- 1 normalization degree value in the neighbourhood of 1 a maximum performance
of the variance normalization for the respective assigned frequency interval.

For the generation of the normalization degree data from the statistical
5 evaluation data, and in particular for the generation of the normalization
degree values, it is preferred to use transfer functions between statistical
evaluation data and said normalization degree data or normalization degree
values.

- 10 These transfer functions may include the class of piecewise continuous,
continuous or continuous-differentiable functions or the like, in particular so
as to achieve a smooth and/or differentiable transition between said statistical
evaluation data and said normalization degree data and/or said normalization
degree values.

5 Preferred examples for said transfer functions are theta-functions, sigmoidal
functions, or the like.

- A preferred embodiment for carrying out said variance normalization per se is
20 a multiplication of said speech signal and/or of a derivative or component
thereof with a so-called reduction factor R which is a function of the signal
noise and/or of the normalization degree data or normalization degree values.
Again, this may include the frequency dependence with respect to certain
frequency values and/or certain frequency intervals.

25 A particular preferred example for said reduction factor R - which may be
again frequency-dependent - is

$$R = 1 / (1 + (\sigma - 1) \cdot D)$$

30 with σ denoting the temporal standard deviation of the speech signal, its
derivative or component, and/or its feature. In this structure D denotes the
normalization degree value, which again may also be frequency-dependent.

- 35 The features and benefits of the present invention may become more apparent
from the following remarks:

1 In automatic speech recognition the preprocessing step with respect to the
input speech data is of crucial importance in order to achieve low word error
rates and high robustness against background noise, in particular with respect
to the following recognition process.

5 One particular preprocessing step - the so-called variance normalization - has
been found to improve the recognition rate in some cases, but not in all
situations.

10 It is therefore the key idea of the present invention to apply variable levels of
variance normalization, the levels being dependent for instance on the amount
of background noise found in the speech data.

20 The invention therefore manages the situation that variance normalization
works well when applied to noisy data but deteriorates the recognition rate
when applied to undisturbed input data.

25 The proposed method - and in particular the preprocessing section of the
method - may be realized in a two-step procedure with a first step carrying out
the determination or measurement of the noise within the input data, in
particular of the signal-to-noise ratio (SNR), and the second step comprising
the application of a SNR-dependent variance normalization to the input data.

30 For the first step either external data from for instance a second microphone
and/or from knowledge about the application and/or from single-channel
estimation methods can be used. The exact way of determining the signal-to-
noise ratio does not affect the way and the result of the method. There has
been extensive work on the field of SNR-estimation in the past, and any of the
known procedures or algorithms in this field might be used in the context of
this invention.

35 The second step, namely the application of SNR-dependent variance normali-
zation - the degree of variance normalization D , which may range from 0 to 1 -
is determined by employing for instance a transfer function between the SNR-
estimate and D . As the optimal analytical form of the transfer function and
therefore of D is not yet determined or known, natural choices may be
included for said determination, in particular the theta-function which effec-

1 tively switches variance normalization off in the case of clean or undisturbed
data and which switches variance normalization to its maximum for distorted
input may be used. Another choice may be the class of sigmoidal function
which provides the smooth and differentiable transition or interpolation
5 between the case of no variance normalization and the maximum variance nor-
malization.

The variance normalization itself can easily be computed by dividing the input
data by $(1 + (\sigma - 1) \cdot D)$. σ denotes the standard deviation of the input features
10 over time. In contrast, conventional method simply divide the input features by
 σ without taking into account the normalization degree D .

15 In the proposed method the input data can have an arbitrary representation
for example short-time spectral or cepstral parameters. The standard deviation
of the input features can be computed in an arbitrary way, for example using
the current speech recording. It has been observed that standard variance
normalization is more effective if the standard deviation estimate σ is com-
puted on more than one utterances of speech from a given speaker. The pro-
posed method is independent from the way of deriving σ and hence the method
20 can be used even in the case where σ has to be iteratively adapted, whenever
new speech is input into the system.

The invention will now be described in more detail taking reference to
accompanying Figures on the basis of preferred embodiments of the inventive
25 method for recognizing speech.

Fig. 1 is a schematical block diagram giving an overview over the
inventive method for recognizing speech according to the
present invention.

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Fig. 2 is a schematical block diagram describing in more detail the
preprocessing section of the embodiment of the inventive
method shown in Fig. 1.

35 As shown in the schematical block diagram of Fig. 1 the inventive method for
recognizing speech is generally composed by a first step S1 of inputting and/or
receiving a speech signal S. In the following step S2 said speech signal S and/

- 1 or derivatives S' or components thereof are preprocessed. In the following step S3 the output of the preprocessing section S2 is subjected to a recognition process S3.
- 5 Finally, in the last step S4 the recognition result is output.

The schematical block diagram of Fig. 2 elucidates in more detail the steps of the preprocessing section S2 of the embodiment shown in Fig. 1.

- 10 In general, the received or input speech signal S is of analogue form. Therefore, in step S10 of the preprocessing section S2 said analogue speech signal S is digitized.

- 15 Following the digitizing step S10 the speech signal S and/or derivatives S' or components thereof are subjected to a statistical evaluation in step S11 so as to provide and generate statistical evaluation data ED.

- 20 Based on the so generated statistical evaluation data ED, which may contain a value for the signal-to-noise ratio SNR, normalization degree data ND and/or normalization degree values Dj are derived in step S12 as a function of said statistical evaluation data ED.

Then conventionally, further preprocessing steps may be performed as indicated by section S13.

- 25 Finally, in step S14 with substeps 14a and 14b a process of variance normalization VN is applied to said speech signal S and/or to derivatives S' and components thereof. The degree and/or the strength of the variation normalization VN is dependent on and/or a function of the normalization degree data ND and/or of the normalization degree values Dj being generated in step S12. The variance normalization VN is performed in step 14b if according to the condition of step 14a the value or values for said normalization degree data ND, Dj are not in a neighbourhood of 0.